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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 001894

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SUBJECT: Sant'Egidio Returns From the Bush with Hope

REF: Khartoum 01881

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: While the negotiating team focuses on social issues and power sharing, the leader of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) cares only about his own fate and that of his commanders, according to mediators from the Communista' Di Sant'Egidio (CSE). Returning from a trip to the LRA camp, the CSE reps said that Riek Machar, lead mediator and Vice President of Southern Sudan, was upset at the degree of disconnect between LRA leader Joseph Kony and the politically-oriented LRA negotiating team. Despite this problem, the CSE team noted that Kony seemed eager for peace. They thought an agreement could even be possible within the month if certain obstacles, like the ICC indictments, could be addressed.
END SUMMARY.

Kony Wants Reconciliation and Personal Safety

¶2. (SBU) During the week of July 30, Riek Machar led a group to meet with Kony and his commanders at the isolated LRA camp a short walk across the border into DR Congo from Nabanga. The group included Ugandan government officials, the LRA negotiating team from Juba, Acholi and northern Ugandan society leaders, GoSS representatives, journalists, UNICEF, and CSE. The LRA took the group to a small clearing that the LRA called its parliament; they subsequently discussed peace with Joseph Kony and his principal deputy, Vincent Otti.

¶3. (SBU) Kony began by addressing the Acholi leaders, including the tribe's chief, with considerable deference. Kony explained that the Acholi leadership had asked him to begin this rebellion 20 years ago, but that now he felt abandoned. Kony said his only condition for peace was reconciliation and guaranteed safety and freedom for him and his men. While he did not mention the atrocities in Uganda, he did apologize to the Southern Sudanese for what he had done. Kony did not discuss any of the political issues that had taken center stage at the talks in Juba.

¶4. (SBU) Kony and his commanders also acknowledged the relationship developed with Machar, who served as one of their principal liaisons when he was fighting with the North. The CSE representatives said this clearly made Machar uncomfortable. Kony then briefly referenced the Ten Commandments and visions of the Holy Ghost, but did not focus on them. Kony had previously claimed that the Holy Ghost had ordered him to overthrow the Ugandan government and replace it with one based on the Ten Commandments.

Negotiations Have Their Own Agenda

¶5. (SBU) While Kony said he had appointed the mainly diaspora LRA negotiating team, it became clear that the divisions between them

were even greater than anyone had expected. According to the CSE team, Kony was unaware of the political demands discussed at the talks, and seemed unable to understand the issues. During the meeting, some of the Acholi Southern Sudanese said that the LRA translators from the Juba team had even altered Kony's message to their advantage. While there were some good people on the team, the CSE representatives commented that most of them were advancing their own political careers or just after money.

¶6. (SBU) Annoyed by the distance between the LRA's negotiators and its leaders, Machar demanded that the LRA announce an immediate ceasefire and send Otti to the talks. Otti suspected this ultimatum was a trap and refused to go to Juba while the ICC warrants were outstanding. In the end, everyone agreed to continue moving forward with the existing delegation in Juba, starting August 7.

The Way Forward

¶7. (SBU) The CSE team said it had convinced Otti to agree to go to Juba, with the timeframe left open. The reps also noted that the LRA had announced the unilateral ceasefire that Machar requested. Experienced mediators, the CSE reps said they were impressed with Machar's ability to broker the talks. They did not feel additional international support was necessary, except perhaps for a helicopter to ferry delegations to the LRA camp for frequent consultations. They noted this would cut the 13-hour drive from Maridi to Nabanga to a few minutes.

¶8. (SBU) While not willing to be optimistic, the CSE team believed that the negotiations were real. Kony showed genuine deference to the Acholi leaders, and every LRA member, from Kony on down, had a the look of fear. They think Kony refused a request to release his Southern Sudanese child abductees as a sign of goodwill because children are his main bargaining chip and the heart of his movement. They noted that a negotiation based on reconciliation and security,

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while worse for the IDPs, would be much simpler. A resolution was possible in less than a month, they said, well before the Ugandan's September 12 deadline.

¶9. (SBU) The CSE reps said that the ICC could take credit for helping to bring about the talks, but now should step aside. They explained that Article 53 allowed cases to be dropped in the interest of local justice. Still, security guarantees would be difficult, as Otti repeated several times that he does not want to share Charles Taylor's fate. However, the CSE believes the Ugandans would favor a quick and quiet resolution that would avoid a careful investigation into actions of the Ugandan army.

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